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The Rise of the Israel Lobby: A Measure of Its Power

By Kathleen and Bill Christison

Ten, even five years ago, a fierce public debate over the nature and activities of the Israeli lobby would have been impossible. It was as verboten as the use of the word Empire to describe the global reach of the United States. Through its disdain for the usual proprieties decorously observed by Republican and Democratic administrations in the past, the Bush administration has hauled many realities of our political economy center stage. Open up the New York Times or the Washington Post these days and there may well be another opinion column about the Lobby.

CounterPunch has hosted some of the most vigorous polemics on the Lobby. In May we asked two of our most valued contributors, Kathy and Bill Christison, to offer their evaluation of the debate on the Lobby's role and power. As our readers know, Bill and Kathy both had significant careers as CIA analysts. Bill was a National Intelligence Officer. In the aftermath of the September, 2001, attacks we published here his trenchant and influential essay on "the war on terror". Kathy has written powerfully both here and on on our website on the topic of Palestine. Specifically on the Lobby they contributed an unsparing essay on the topic of "dual loyalty" which can be found in our CounterPunch collection, *The Politics of Anti-Semitism*.

In mid May they sent us their measured assessment, rich in historical detail. We are delighted to print it here in its entirety, which means our subscribers get the bonus of an 8-page issue. Which is the tail? Which is the dog? asked Uri Avnery here, a few issues back, apropos the respective roles of the Israel Lobby and the US government in the exercise of US policy in the Middle East. Here's an answer that will be tough to challenge. A.C./J.S.C.

John Mearsheimer and Stephen Walt, the University of Chicago and Harvard political scientists who published in March of this years a lengthy, well documented study on the pro-Israel lobby and its influence on U.S. Middle East policy in March , have already accomplished what they intended. They have successfully called attention to the often pernicious influence of the lobby on policymaking. But, unfortunately, the study has aroused more criticism than debate – not only the kind of criticism one would anticipate from the usual suspects among the very lobby groups Mearsheimer and Walt described, but also from a group on the left that might have been expected to support the study's conclusions.

The criticism has been partly silly, often malicious, and almost entirely off-point. The silly, insubstantial criticisms – such as former presidential adviser David Gergen's earnest comment that through four administrations he never observed an Oval Office decision that tilted policy in favor of Israel at the expense of U.S. interests – can easily be dismissed as nonsensical . Most of the extensive malicious criticism, coming largely from the hard core of Israeli supporters who make up the very lobby under discussion and led by a hysterical Alan Dershowitz, has been so specious and sophomoric, that it too could be dismissed were it not for precisely the pervasive atmosphere of reflexive support for Israel and silenced debate that Mearsheimer and Walt describe.

Most disturbing and harder to dismiss is the criticism of the study from the left, coming chiefly from Noam Chomsky and Norman Finkelstein, and abetted less cogently by Stephen Zunes of Foreign Policy in Focus and Joseph Massad of Columbia University. These critics on the left argue from a assumption that U.S. foreign policy has been monolithic since World War II, a coherent progression of decision-making directed unerringly at the advancement of U.S. imperial interests. All U.S. actions, these critics contend, are part of a clearly laid-out strategy that has rarely deviated no matter what the party in power. They believe that Israel has served throughout as a loyal agent of the U.S., carrying out the U.S. design faithfully and serving as a base from which the U.S. projects its power around the Middle East. Zunes says it most clearly, affirming that Israel "still is very much the junior partner in the relationship." These critics do not dispute the existence of a lobby, but they minimize its importance, claiming that rather than leading the U.S. into policies and foreign adventures that stand against true U.S. national interests, as Mearsheimer and Walt assert, the U.S. is actually the controlling power in the relationship with Israel and carries out a consistent policy, using Israel as its agent where possible.

Finkelstein summarized the critics' position in a recent CounterPunch article ("The Israel Lobby," May 1**,** emphasizing that the issue is not whether U.S. interests or those of the lobby take precedence but rather that there has been such coinci-

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dence of U.S. and Israeli interests over the decades that for the most part basic U.S. Middle East policy has not been affected by the lobby. Chomsky maintains that Israel does the U.S. bidding in the Middle East in pursuit of imperial goals that Washington would pursue even without Israel and that it has always pursued in areas outside the Middle East without benefit of any lobby. Those goals have always included advancement of U.S. corporate-military interests and political domination through the suppression of radical nationalisms and the maintenance of stability in resource-rich countries, particularly oil producers, everywhere. In the Middle East, this was accomplished primarily through Israel's 1967 defeat of Egypt's Gamal Abdul Nasser and his radical Arab nationalism, which had threatened U.S. access to the region's oil resources. Both Chomsky and Finkelstein trace the strong U.S.-Israeli tie to the June 1967 war, which they believe established the close alliance and marked the point at which the U.S. began to regard Israel as a strategic asset and a stable base from which U.S. power could be projected throughout the Middle East.

Joseph Massad ("Blaming the Israel Lobby," CounterPunch, March 25/26) argues along similar lines, describing developments in the Middle East and around the world that he believes the U.S. engineered for its own benefit and would have carried out even without Israel's assistance. His point, like Chomsky's, is that the U.S. has a long history of overthrowing regimes in Central America, in Chile, in Indonesia, in Africa, where the Israel lobby was not involved and where Israel at most assisted the U.S. but did not benefit directly itself. He goes farther than Chomsky by claiming that with respect to the Middle East Israel has been such an essential tool that its very usefulness is what accounts for the strength of the lobby. "It is in fact the very centrality of Israel to U.S. strategy in the Middle East," Massad contends with a kind of backward logic, "that accounts, in part, for the strength of the pro-Israel lobby and not the other way around." (One wonders why, if this were the case, there would be any need for a lobby at all. What would be a lobby's function if the U.S. already regarded Israel as central to its strategy?)

The principal problem with these arguments from the left is that they assume a continuity in U.S. strategy and policymaking over the decades that has never in fact existed. The notion that there is any defined strategy that links Eisenhower's policy to Johnson's to Reagan's to Clinton's gives far more credit than is deserved to the extremely ad hoc, hit-or-miss nature of all U.S. foreign policy. Obviously, some level of imperial interest has dictated policy in every administration since World War II and, obviously, the need to guarantee access to vital natural resources around the world, such as oil in the Middle East and elsewhere, has played a critical role in determining policy. But beyond these evident, and not particularly significant, truths, it can accurately be said, at least with regard to the Middle East, that it has been a rare administration that has itself ever had a coherent, clearly defined, and consistent foreign policy and that, except for a broadly defined anti-communism during the Cold War, no administration's strategy has ever carried over in detail to succeeding administrations.

The ad hoc nature of virtually every administration's policy planning process cannot be overemphasized. Aside from the strong but amorphous political need felt in both major U.S. parties and nurtured by the Israel lobby that "supporting Israel" was vital to each party's own future, the inconsistent, even short-term randomness in the detailed Middle East policymaking of successive administrations has been remarkable. This lack of clear strategic thinking at the very top levels of several new administrations before they entered office enhanced the power of individuals and groups that did have clear goals and plans already in hand – such as, for instance, the pro-Israeli Dennis Ross in both the first Bush and the Clinton administrations, and the strongly pro-Israeli neo-cons in the current Bush administration.

The critics on the left argue that because the U.S. has a history of opposing and frequently undermining or actually overthrowing radical nationalist governments throughout the world without any involvement by Israel, any instance in which Israel acts against radical nationalism in the Arab world is, therefore, proof that Israel is doing the United States' work for it . The critics generally believe, for instance, that Israel's political destruction of Egypt's Nasser in 1967 was done for the U.S. Most if not all believe that Israel's 1982 invasion of Lebanon was undertaken at U.S.behest, to destroy the PLO.

This kind of argumentation assumes too much on a presumption of policy coherence. Lyndon Johnson most certainly did abhor Nasser and was not sorry to see him and his pan-Arab ambitions defeated, but there is absolutely no evidence that the Johnson administration ever seriously planned to unseat Nasser, formulated any other action plan against Egypt, or pushed Israel in any way to attack. Johnson did apparently give a green light to Israel's attack plans after they had been formulated, but this is quite different from initiating the plans. Already mired in Vietnam, Johnson was very much concerned not to be drawn into a war initiated by Israel and was criticized by some Israeli supporters for not acting forcefully enough on Israel's behalf. In any case, Israel needed no prompting for its pre-emptive attack, which had long been in the works.

Indeed, far from Israel functioning as the junior partner carrying out a U.S. plan, it is clear that the weight of pressure in 1967 was on the U.S. to go along with Israel's designs and that this pressure came from Israel and its agents in the U.S. The lobby in this instance – as broadly defined by Mearsheimer and Walt: "the loose coalition of individuals and organizations who actively work to shape U.S. foreign policy in a pro-Israel direction" – was in fact a part of Johnson's intimate circle of friends and advisers.

These included the number-two man at the Israeli embassy, a close personal

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friend; the strongly pro-Israeli Rostow brothers, Walt and Eugene, who were part of the national security bureaucracy in the administration; Supreme Court Justice Abe Fortas; U.N. Ambassador Arthur Goldberg; and numerous others who all spent time with Johnson at the LBJ Ranch in Texas and had the personal access and the leisure time in an informal setting to talk with Johnson about their concern for Israel and to influence him heavily in favor of Israel. This circle had already begun to work on Johnson long before Israel's pre-emptive attack in 1967, so they were nicely placed to persuade Johnson to go along with it despite Johnson's fears of provoking the Soviet Union and becoming involved in a military conflict the U.S. was not prepared for.

In other words, Israel was beyond question the senior partner in this particular policy initiative; Israel made the decision to go to war, would have gone to war with or without the U.S. green light, and used its lobbyists in the U.S. to steer Johnson administration policy in a pro-Israeli direction. Israel's attack on the U.S. naval vessel, the *USS Liberty*, in the midst of the war – an attack conducted in broad daylight that killed 34 American sailors – was not the act of a junior partner. Nor was the U.S. cover-up of this atrocity the act of a government that dictated the moves in this relationship.

The evidence is equally clear that Israel was the prime mover in the 1982 invasion of Lebanon and led the U.S. into that morass, rather than the other way around. Although Massad refers to the U.S. as Israel's master, in this instance as in many others including 1967, Israel has clearly been its own master. Chomsky argues in support of his case that Reagan ordered Israel to call off the invasion in August, two months after it was launched. This is true, but in fact Israel did not pay any attention; the invasion continued, and the U.S. got farther and farther embroiled.

When, as occurred in Lebanon, the U.S. has blundered into misguided adventures to support Israel or to rescue Israel or to further Israel's interests, it is a clear denial of reality to say that Israel and its lobby have no significant influence on U.S. Middle East policy. Even were there not an abundance of other examples, Lebanon alone, with its long-term implications, proves the truth of the Mearsheimer-Walt conclusion that the U.S. "has set aside its own security in order to advance the interests of another state" and that "the overall thrust of U.S. policy in the region is due almost entirely to U.S. domestic politics, and especially to the activities of the 'Israel Lobby.'"

As a general proposition, the left critics' argumentation is much too limiting. While there is no question that modern history is replete, as they argue, with examples of the U.S. acting in corporate interests – overthrowing nationalist governments perceived to be threatening U.S. business and economic interests, as in Iran in 1953, Guatemala in 1954, Chile in 1973, and elsewhere – this frequent convergence of corporate with government interests does not mean that the U.S. never acts in other than corporate interests. The fact of a strong government-corporate alliance does not in any way preclude situations – even in the Middle East, where oil is obviously a vital corporate resource – in which the U.S. acts primarily to benefit Israel rather than serve any corporate or economic purpose. Because it has a deep emotional aspect and involves political, economic, and military ties unlike those with any other nation, the U.S. relationship with Israel is unique, and there is nothing in the history of U.S. foreign policy, nothing in the government's entanglement with the military-industrial complex, to prevent the lobby from exerting heavy influence on policy. Israel and its lobbyists make their own "corporation" that, like the oil industry (or Chiquita Banana or Anaconda Copper in other areas), is clearly a major factor driving U.S. foreign policy.

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There is no denying the intricate interweaving of the U.S. military-industrial complex with Israeli military-industrial interests. Chomsky acknowledges that there is "plenty of conformity" between the lobby's position and the U.S. government-corporate linkage and that the two are very difficult to disentangle. But, although he tends to emphasize that the U.S. is always the senior partner and suggests that the Israeli side does little more than support whatever the U.S. arms, energy, and financial industries define as U.S. national interests, in actual fact the entanglement is much more one between equals than the raw strengths of the two parties would suggest. "Conformity" hardly captures the magnitude of the relationship. Particularly in the defense arena, Israel and its lobby and the U.S. arms industry work hand in glove to advance their combined, very compatible interests. The relatively few very powerful and wealthy families that dominate the Israeli arms industry are just as interested in pressing for aggressively militaristic U.S. and Israeli foreign policies as are the CEOs of U.S. arms corporations and, as globalization has progressed, so have the ties of joint ownership and close financial and technological cooperation among the arms corporations of the two nations grown ever closer. In every way, the two nations' military industries work together very easily and very quietly, to a common end. The relationship is symbiotic, and the lobby cooperates intimately to keep it alive; lobbyists can go to many in the U.S. Congress and tell them quite credibly that if aid to Israel is cut off, thousands of arms-industry jobs in their own districts will be lost. That's power. The lobby is not simply passively supporting whatever the U.S. military-industrial complex wants. It is actively twisting arms – very successfully – in both Congress and the administration to perpetuate acceptance of a definition of U.S. "national interests" that many Americans believe is wrong, as does Chomsky himself.

Clearly, the advantages in the relationship go in both directions: Israel serves U.S. corporate interests by using, and often helping develop, the arms that U.S. manufacturers produce, and the U.S. serves Israeli interests by providing a constant stream of high-tech equipment that maintains Israel's vast military superiority in the region.

But simply because the U.S. benefits from this relationship, it cannot be said that the U.S. is Israel's master, or that Israel

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always does the U.S. bidding, or that the lobby, which helps keep this arms alliance alive, has no significant power. It's in the nature of a symbiosis that both sides benefit, and the lobby has played a huge role in maintaining the interdependence.

The left's arguments also tend to be much too conspiratorial. Finkelstein, for instance, describes a supposed strategy in which the U.S. perpetually undermines Israeli-Arab reconciliation because it does not want an Israel at peace with its neighbors, since Israel would then loosen its dependence on the U.S. and become a less reliable proxy. "What use," he asks, "would a Paul Wolfowitz have of an Israel living peacefully with its Arab neighbors and less willing to do the U.S.'s bidding?"

Not only does this give the U.S. far more credit than it has ever deserved for long-term strategic scheming and the ability to carry out such a conspiracy, but it begs a very important question that neither Finkelstein nor the other left critics, in their dogged effort to mold all developments to their thesis, never examine: just what U.S.'s bidding is Israel doing nowadays?

Although the leftist critics speak of Israel as a base from which U.S. power is projected throughout the Middle East, they do not clearly explain how this works. Any strategic value Israel had for the U.S. diminished drastically with the collapse of the Soviet Union. They may believe that Israel keeps Saudi Arabia's oil resources safe from Arab nationalists or Muslim fundamentalists or Russia, but this is highly questionable.

Israel clearly did us no good in Lebanon, but rather the U.S. did Israel's bidding and fumbled badly, so this cannot be how the U.S. uses Israeli to project its power. In Palestine, Finkelstein himself acknowledges that the U.S. gains nothing from the occupation and Israeli settlements, so this can't be where Israel is doing the U.S.'s bidding. (With this acknowledgement, Finkelstein, perhaps unconsciously, seriously undermines his case against the importance of the lobby, unless he somehow believes the occupation is only of incidental significance, in which case he undermines the thesis of much of his own body of writing.)

Owning the Policymakers

In the clamor over the Mearsheimer-Walt study, critics on both the left and the right have tended to ignore the slow evolutionary history of U.S. Middle East policymaking and of the U.S. relationship with Israel. The ties to Israel and earlier to Zionism go back more than a century, predating the formation of a lobby, and they have remained firm even at periods when the lobby has waned. But it is also true that the lobby has sustained and formalized a relationship that otherwise rests on emotions and moral commitment. Because the bond with Israel has been a steadily evolving continuum, dating back to well before Israel's formal establishment, it is important to emphasize that there is no single point at which it is possible to say, this is when Israel won the affections of America, or this is when Israel came to be regarded as a strategic asset, or this is when the lobby became an integral part of U.S. policymaking.

The left critics of the lobby study mark the Johnson administration as the beginning of the U.S.-Israeli alliance, but almost every administration before Johnson's, going back to Woodrow Wilson, ratcheted up the relationship in some significant way and could justifiably claim to have been the progenitor of the bond. Significantly, in almost all cases, policymakers acted as they did because of the influence of pro-Zionist or pro-Israeli lobbyists: Wilson would not have supported the Zionist enterprise to the extent he did had it not been for the influence of Zionist colleagues like Louis Brandeis; nor would Roosevelt; Truman would probably not have been as supportive of establishing a Jewish state without the heavy influence of his very pro-Zionist advisers.

After the Johnson administration as well, the relationship has continued to grow in remarkable leaps. The Nixon-Kissinger regime could claim that they were the administration that cemented the alliance by exponentially increasing military aid – from an annual average of under $50 million in military credits to Israel in the late 1960s to an average of almost $400 million and, in the year following the 1973 war, to $2.2 billion. It is not for nothing that Israelis have informally dubbed almost every president since Johnson – with the notable exceptions of Jimmy Carter and the senior George Bush – as "the most pro-Israeli president ever"; each one has achieved some landmark in the effort to please Israel.

The U.S.-Israeli bond has always had its grounding more in soft emotions than in the hard realities of geopolitical strategy. Scholars have always described the tie in almost spiritual terms never applied to ties with other nations. A Palestinian-French scholar has described the United States' pro-Israeli tilt as a "predisposition," a natural inclination that precedes any consideration of interest or of cost. Israel, he said, takes part in the very "being" of American society and therefore participates in its integrity and its defense.

This is not simply the biased perspective of a Palestinian. Other scholars of varying political inclinations have described a similar spiritual and cultural identity: the U.S. identifies with Israel's "national style"; Israel is essential to the "ideological prospering" of the U.S.; each country has "grafted" the heritage of the other onto itself. This applies even to the worst aspects of each nation's heritage. Consciously or unconsciously, many Israelis even today see the U.S. conquest of the American Indians as something "good," something to emulate and, which is worse, many Americans even today are happy to accept the "compliment" inherent in Israel's effort to copy us.

This is no ordinary state-to-state relationship, and the lobby does not function like any ordinary lobby. It is not a great exaggeration to say that the lobby could not thrive without a very willing host – that is, a series of U.S. policymaking establishments that have always been locked in to a mindset singularly focused on Israel and its interests – and, at the same time, that U.S. policy in the Middle East would not possibly have remained so singularly focused on and so tilted toward Israel were it not for the lobby. One thing is certain: with the possible exceptions of the Carter and the first Bush administrations, the relationship has grown noticeably closer and more solid with each administration, in almost exact correlation with the growth in size and budget and political clout of the pro-Israel lobby.

All critics of the lobby study have failed to note a critical point during the Reagan administration, surrounding the debacle in Lebanon, when it can reasonably be said that policymaking tipped over from a situation in which the U.S. was more often the controlling agent in the relationship to one in which Israel and its advocates in the U.S. have increasingly determined the course and the pace of developments. The

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organized lobby, meaning AIPAC and the several formal Jewish American organizations, truly came into its own during the Reagan years with a massive expansion of memberships, budgets, propaganda activities, and contacts within Congress and government, and it has been consolidating power and influence for the last quarter century, so that today the broadly defined lobby, including all those who work for Israel, has become an integral part of U.S. society and U.S. policymaking.

The situation during the Reagan administration demonstrates very clearly the closeness of the bond. The events of these years illustrate how an already very Israel-centered mindset in the U.S., which had been developing for decades, was transformed into a concrete, institutionalized relationship with Israel via the offices of Israeli supporters and agents in the U.S.

The seminal event in the growth of AIPAC and the organized lobby was the battle over the administration's proposed sale of AWACS aircraft to Saudi Arabia in 1981, Reagan's first year in office. Paradoxically, although AIPAC lost this battle in a head-on struggle with Reagan and the administration, and the sale to the Saudis went forward, AIPAC and the lobby ultimately won the war for influence. Reagan was determined that the sale go through; he regarded the deal as an important part of an ill-conceived attempt to build an Arab-Israeli consensus in the Middle East to oppose the Soviet Union and, perhaps even more important, saw the battle in Congress as a test of his own prestige. By winning the battle, he demonstrated that any administration, at least up to that point, could exert enough pressure to push an issue opposed by Israel through Congress, but the struggle also demonstrated how exhausting and politically costly such a battle can be, and no one around Reagan was willing to go to the mat in this way again. In a real sense, despite AIPAC's loss, the fight showed just how much the lobby limited policymaker freedom, even more than 20 years ago, in any transaction that concerned Israel.

The AWACS imbroglio galvanized AIPAC into action, at precisely the time the administration was subsiding in exhaustion, and under an aggressive and energetic leader, former congressional aide Thomas Dine, AIPAC quadrupled its budget, increased its grassroots support immensely, and vastly expanded its propaganda effort. This last and perhaps most significant accomplishment was achieved when Dine established an analytical unit inside AIPAC that published in-depth analyses and position papers for congressmen and policymakers. Dine believed that anyone who could provide policymakers with books and papers focusing on Israel's strategic value to the U.S. would effectively "own" the policymakers.

With the rising power and influence of the lobby, and following the U.S. debacle in Lebanon – which began with Israel's 1982 invasion and ended for the U.S. with the withdrawal of its Marine contingent in early 1984, after the Marines had become involved in fighting to protect Israel's invasion force and 241 U.S. military had been killed in a truck bombing – the Reagan administration effectively handed over the policy initiative in the Middle East to Israel and its American advocates.

Israel and its agents began, with amazing effrontery, to complain that the U.S. failure to clean up in Lebanon was interfering with Israel's own designs there – from which arrogance Reagan and company concluded, in an astounding twist of logic, that the only way to restore stability was through closer alliance with Israel. As a result, in the fall of 1983 Reagan sent a delegation to *ask* the Israelis for closer strategic ties, and shortly thereafter forged a formal strategic alliance with Israel with the signing of a "memorandum of understanding on strategic cooperation." In 1987, the U.S. designated Israel a "major non-NATO ally," thus giving it access to military technology not available otherwise. The notion of demanding concessions from Israel in return for this favored status – such as, for instance, some restraint in its settlement-construction in the West Bank – was specifically rejected. The U.S. simply very deliberately and abjectly retreated into policy inaction, leaving Israel with a free hand to proceed as it wished wherever it wished in the Middle East and particularly in the occupied Palestinian territories.

Even Israel, by all accounts, was surprised by this demonstration of the United States' inability to see beyond Israel's interests. Prime Minister Menachem Begin had attempted from early in the Carter administration to push the notion that Israel was a strategic Cold War asset to the U.S. but, because Israel did not in fact perform a significant strategic role for the U.S. and was in many ways more a liability than an asset, Carter never paid serious attention to the Israeli overtures. Begin feared that the United States' moral and emotional commitment to Israel might ultimately not be enough to sustain the relationship through possible hard times, and so he attempted to put Israel forward as a strategically indispensable ally and a good investment for U.S. security, a move that would essentially reverse the two nations' roles, altering the relationship from one of Israeli indebtedness to the U.S. to one in which the United States was in Israel's debt for its vital strategic role.

Carter was having none of this, but the notion of strategic cooperation germinated in Israel and among its U.S. supporters until the moment became ripe during the Reagan administration. By the end of the Lebanon mess, the notion that the U.S. needed Israel's friendship had so taken hold among the Reaganites that, as one former national security aide observed in a stunning upending of logic, they began to view closer strategic ties as a necessary means of "restor[ing] Israeli confidence in American reliability." Secretary of State George Shultz wrote in his memoirs years later of the U.S. need "to lift the albatross of Lebanon from Israel's neck." Recall, as Shultz must not have been able to do, that the debt here was rightly Israel's: Israel put the albatross around its own neck, and the U.S. stumbled into Lebanon after Israel, not the other way around.

AIPAC and the neo-conservatives who rose to prominence during the Reagan years played a major role in building the strategic alliance. AIPAC in particular became in every sense of the word a partner of the U.S. in forging Middle East policy from the mid-1980s on. Thomas Dine's vision

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of "owning" policymakers by providing them with position papers geared to Israel's interests went into full swing. In 1984, AIPAC spun off a think tank, the Washington Institute for Near East Policy, that remains one of the pre-eminent think tanks in Washington and that has sent its analysts into policymaking jobs in several administrations. Dennis Ross, the senior Middle East policymaker in the administrations of George H.W. Bush and Bill Clinton, came from the Washington Institute and returned there after leaving the government. Martin Indyk, the Institute's first director, entered a top policymaking position in the Clinton administration from there.

Today, John Hannah, who has served on Vice President Cheney's national security staff since 2001 and succeeded Lewis Libby last year as Cheney's leading national security adviser, comes from the Institute. AIPAC also continues to do its own analyses in addition to the Washington Institute's. A recent *Washington Post* profile of Steven Rosen, the former senior AIPAC foreign policy analyst who is about to stand trial with a colleague for receiving and passing on classified information to Israel, noted that two decades ago Rosen began a practice of lobbying the executive branch, rather than simply concentrating on Congress, as a way, in the words of the *Post* article, "to alter American foreign policy" by "influencing government from the inside." Over the years, he "had a hand in writing several policies favored by Israel."

In the Reagan years, AIPAC's position papers were particularly welcomed by an administration already more or less convinced of Israel's strategic value and obsessed with impeding Soviet advances. Policymakers began negotiating with AIPAC before presenting legislation in order to help assure passage, and Congress consulted the lobby on pending legislation. Congress eagerly embraced almost every legislative initiative proposed by the lobby and came to rely on AIPAC for information on all issues related to the Middle East. The close cooperation between the administration and AIPAC soon began to stifle discourse inside the bureaucracy. Middle East experts in the State Department and other agencies were almost completely cut out of decision-making, and officials throughout government became increasingly unwilling to propose policies or put forth analysis likely to arouse opposition from AIPAC or Congress. One unnamed official complained that "a lot of real analysis is not even getting off people's desks for fear of what the lobby will do"; he was speaking to a *New York Times* correspondent, but otherwise his complaints fell on deaf ears.

This kind of pervasive influence, a chill on discourse inside as well as outside policymaking councils, does not require the sort of clear-cut, concrete pro-Israeli decisions in the Oval Office that David Gergen naively thought he should have witnessed if the lobby had any real influence. This kind of influence, which uses friendly persuasion, along with just enough direct pressure, on a broad range of policymakers, legislators, media commentators, and grassroots activists to make an impression across the spectrum, cannot be defined in terms of narrow, concrete policy commands, but becomes an unchanging, unchallengeable mindset, a sentimental environment that restricts debate, restricts thinking, and determines actions and policies as surely as any command from on high. When Israel's advocates, its lobbyists, in the U.S. become an integral part of the policymaking apparatus, as they have particularly since the Reagan years – and as they clearly have been during the current Bush administration – there is no way to separate the lobby's interests from U.S. policies. Moreover, because Israel's strategic goals in the region are more clearly defined and more urgent than those of the United States, Israel's interests most often dominate.

By Clintontime, the lobby had become a part of the policymaking apparatus, in the persons of Israeli advocates Dennis Ross and Martin Indyk, both of whom entered government service from lobby organizations.

Chomsky himself acknowledges that the lobby plays a significant part in shaping the political environment in which support for Israel becomes automatic and unquestioned. Even Chomsky believes that what he calls the intellectual political class is a critical, and perhaps the most influential, component of the lobby because these elites determine the shaping of news and information in the media and academia. On the other hand, he contends that, because the lobby already includes most of this intellectual political class, the thesis of lobby power "loses much of its content". But, on the contrary, this very fact would seem to prove the point, not undermine it. The fact of the lobby's pervasiveness, far from rendering it less powerful, magnifies its importance tremendously.

Indeed, this is the crux of the entire debate. It is the very power of the lobby to continue shaping the public mindset, to mold thinking and, perhaps most important, to instill fear of deviation that brings this intellectual political class together in an unswerving determination to work for Israel. Is there not a heavy impact on Middle East policymaking when, for instance, a lobby has the power to force the electoral defeat of long-serving congressmen, as occurred to Representative Paul Findley in 1982 and Senator Charles Percy in 1984 after both had deviated from political correctness by speaking out in favor of negotiating with the PLO? AIPAC openly crowed about the defeat of both men – both Republicans serving during the Republican Reagan administration, who had been in Congress for 22 and 18 years respectively. Similarly, does not the media's silence on Israel's oppressive measures in the occupied territories, as well as the concerted, and openly acknowledged, efforts of virtually every pro-Israeli organization in the U.S. to suppress information and quash debate on the Palestinian-Israeli conflict, have an immense impact on policy? Today, even the most outspoken of leftist radio hosts and other commentators, such as Randi Rhodes, Mike Malloy, and now Cindy Sheehan, almost always avoid talking and writing about this issue.

Does not the massive effort by AIPAC, the Washington Institute, and myriad other similar organizations to spoon-feed policymakers and congressmen selective information and analysis written only from Israel's perspective have a huge impact on policy? In the end, even Chomsky and Finkelstein acknowledge the power of the

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lobby in suppressing discussion and debate about Middle East policy. The mobilization of public opinion, Finkelstein writes, "can have a real impact on policy-making – which is why the Lobby invests so much energy in suppressing discussion." It is difficult to read statement except as a ringing acknowledgement of the massive and very central power of the lobby to control discourse and to control policymaking on the most critical Middle East policy issue.

Interchangeable Interests

The principal problem with the left critics' analysis is that it is too rigid. There is no question that Israel has served the interests of the U.S. government and the military-industrial complex in many areas of the world by, for instance, aiding some of the rightist regimes of Central America, by skirting arms and trade embargoes against apartheid South Africa and China (until the neo-conservatives turned off the tap to China and, in a rare disagreement with Israel, forced it to halt), and during the Cold War by helping, at least indirectly, to hold down Arab radicalism. There is also no question that, no matter which party has been in power, the U.S. has over the decades advanced an essentially conservative global political and pro-business agenda in areas far afield of the Middle East, without reference to Israel or the lobby. The U.S. unseated Mossadegh in Iran and Arbenz in Guatemala and Allende in Chile, along with many others, for its own corporate and political purposes, as the left critics note, and did not use Israel.

But these facts do not minimize the power the lobby has exerted in countless instances over the course of decades, and particularly in recent years, to lead the U.S. into situations that Israel initiated, that the U.S. did not plan, and that have done harm, both singly and cumulatively, to U.S. interests. One need only ask whether particular policies would have been adopted in the absence of pressure from some influential persons and organizations working on Israel's behalf in order to see just how often Israel or its advocates in the U.S., rather than the United States or even U.S. corporations, have been the policy initiators. The answers give clear evidence that a lobby, as broadly defined by Mearsheimer and Walt, has played a critical and, as the decades have gone on, increasingly influential role in policymaking.

For instance, would Harry Truman have been as supportive of establishing Israel as a Jewish state if it had not been for heavy pressure from what was then a very loose grouping of strong Zionists with considerable influence in policymaking circles? It can reasonably be argued that he might not in fact have supported Jewish statehood at all, and it is even more likely that his own White House advisers – all strong Zionist proponents themselves – would not have twisted arms at the United Nations to secure the 1947 vote in favor of partitioning Palestine if these lobbyists had not been a part of Truman's policymaking circle. Truman himself did not initially support the notion of founding a state based on religion, and every national security agency of government, civilian and military , strongly opposed the partition of Palestine out of fear that this would lead to warfare in which the U.S. might have to intervene, would enhance the Soviet position in the Middle East, and would endanger U.S. oil interests in the area. But even in the face of this united opposition from within his own government, Truman found the pressures of the Zionists among his close advisers and among influential friends of the administration and of the Democratic Party too overwhelmingly strong to resist.

Questions like this arise for virtually every presidential administration. Would Jimmy Carter, for instance, have dropped his pursuit of a resolution of the Palestinian problem if the Israel lobby had not exerted intense pressure on him? Carter was the first president to recognize the Palestinian need for some kind of "homeland," as he termed it, and he made numerous efforts to bring Palestinians into a negotiating process and to stop Israeli settlement-building, but opposition from Israel and pressures from the lobby were so heavy that he was ultimately worn down and defeated.

It is also all but impossible to imagine the U.S. supporting Israel's actions in the occupied Palestinian territories without pressure from the lobby. No conceivable U.S. national interest served – even in the United States' own myopic view – by its support for Israel's harshly oppressive policy in the West Bank and Gaza, and furthermore this support is a dangerous liability. As Mearsheimer and Walt note, most foreign elites view the U.S. tolerance of Israeli repression as "morally obtuse and a handicap in the war on terrorism," and this tolerance is a major cause of terrorism against the U.S. and the West. The impetus for oppressing the Palestinians clearly comes and has always come from Israel, not the United States, and the impetus for supporting Israel and facilitating this oppression has come, very clearly and directly, from the lobby, which goes to great lengths to justify the occupation and to advocate on behalf of Israeli policies.

It is tempting, and not at all out of the realm of possibility, to imagine Bill Clinton having forged a final Palestinian-Israeli peace agreement were it not for the influence of his notably pro-Israeli advisers. By the time Clinton came to office, the lobby had become a part of the policymaking apparatus, in the persons of Israeli advocates Dennis Ross and Martin Indyk, both of whom entered government service from lobby organizations. Both also returned at the end of the Clinton administration to organizations that advocate for Israel: Ross to the Washington Institute and Indyk to the Brookings Institution's Saban Center for Middle East Policy, which is financed by and named for a notably pro-Israeli benefactor. The scope of the lobby's infiltration of government policymaking councils has been unprecedented during the current Bush administration. Some of the left critics dismiss the neo-cons as not having any allegiance to Israel; Finkelstein thinks it is naïve to credit them with any ideological conviction, and Zunes claims

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they are uninterested in benefiting Israel because they are not religious Jews (as if only religious Jews care about Israel). But it simply ignores reality to deny the neo-cons' very close ties, both ideological and pragmatic, to Israel's right wing.

Both Finkelstein and Zunes glaringly fail to mention the strategy paper that several neo-cons wrote in the mid-1990s for an Israeli prime minister, laying out a plan for attacking Iraq these same neo-cons later carried out upon entering the Bush administration. The strategy was designed both to assure Israel's regional dominance in the Middle East and to enhance U.S. global hegemony. One of these authors, David Wurmser, remains in government as Cheney's Middle East adviser – one of several lobbyists inside the henhouse. The openly trumpeted plan, crafted by the neo-cons, is to "transform" the Middle East by unseating Saddam Hussein, and the notion, also openly touted, that the path to peace in Palestine-Israel ran through Baghdad grew out of the neo-cons' overriding concern for Israel. Both Finkelstein and Zunes also fail to take note of the long record of advocacy on behalf of Israel that almost all the neo-cons (Paul Wolfowitz, Richard Perle, Douglas Feith, David Wurmser, Elliott Abrams, John Bolton, and their cheerleaders on the sidelines such as William Kristol, Robert Kagan, Norman Podhoretz, Jeane Kirkpatrick, and numerous right-wing, pro-Israeli think tanks in Washington) have compiled over the years. The fact that these individuals and organizations are all also advocates of U.S. global hegemony does not diminish their allegiance to Israel or their desire to assure Israel's regional hegemony in alliance with the U.S.

The claimed interchangeability of U.S. and Israeli interests – and the fact that certain individuals for whom a primary objective is to advance Israel's interests now reside inside the councils of government – proves the truth of the Mearsheimer-Walt's principal conclusion that the lobby has been able to convince most Americans, contrary to reality, that there is an essential identity of U.S. and Israeli interests and that the lobby has succeeded for this reason in forging a relationship of unmatched intimacy. The "overall thrust of policy" in the Middle East, they observe quite accurately, is "almost entirely" attributable to the lobby's activities. The fact that the U.S. occasionally acts without reference to Israel in areas outside the Middle East, and that Israel does occasionally serve U.S. interests rather than the other way around, takes nothing away from the significance of this conclusion.

The tragedy of the present situation is that it has become impossible to separate Israeli from alleged U.S. interests – that is, not what should be real U.S. national interests, but the selfish and self-defined "national interests" of the political-corporate-military complex that dominates the Bush administration, Congress, and both major political parties. The specific groups that now dominate the U.S. government are the globalized arms, energy, and financial industries, and the entire military establishments, of the U.S. *and* of Israel – groups that have quite literally hijacked the government and stripped it of most vestiges of democracy.

This convergence of manipulated "interests" has a profound effect on U.S. policy choices in the Middle East. When a government is unable to distinguish its own real needs from those of another state, it can no longer be said that it always acts in its own interests or that it does not frequently do grave damage to those interests. Until the system of sovereign nation-states no longer exists – and that day may never come – no nation's choices should ever be defined according to the demands of another nation. Accepting a convergence of U.S. and Israeli interests means that the U.S. can never act entirely as its own agent, will never examine its policies and actions entirely from the vantage point of its own long-term self interest, and can, therefore, never know why it is devising and implementing a particular policy. The failure to recognize this reality is where the left critics' belittling of the lobby's power and their acceptance of U.S. Middle East policy as simply an unchangeable part of a longstanding strategy is particularly dangerous. CP

Kathleen Christison is the author of *Perceptions of Palestine*, which analyzes the evolution of U.S. policy on the Palestine issue over the last century and in the process traces the exponential growth since World War I in the influence on policymakers of Israel's powerful American advocates.

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